DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 475 377 RC 024 026

TITLE	A Report on the Review of the Compensation for Teacher Specialists on Site and Their Service in Rural Areas.
INSTITUTION	South Carolina State Dept. of Education, Columbia.; South Carolina State Education Oversight Committee, Columbia.
PUB DATE	2002-11-00
NOTE	12p.
AVAILABLE FROM	For full text: http://www.state.sc.us/eoc/PDF/ReportonCompensationReviewforTSOS.doc.
PUB TYPE	Reports - Research (143)
EDRS PRICE	EDRS Price MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	*Disadvantaged Schools; Elementary Secondary Education; Incentives; Rural Urban Differences; *School Districts; State Programs; Teacher Recruitment; *Teacher Supply and Demand
IDENTIFIERS	*South Carolina; *Teacher Specialists

ABSTRACT

In 1998 South Carolina state legislation established the Teacher Specialist on Site (TSOS) program, to assign teacher specialists to school districts designated as below average or unsatisfactory. The need for TSOS has grown each year, and despite varied recruitment efforts, many vacancies exist. Concerns that vacancies would disproportionately affect rural areas led the state General Assembly to order a study of teacher participation in the TSOS program and the relative needs of rural districts. Salary was an important factor influencing participation, with TSOS receiving a bonus of about $20,000 in 2002-03. The recruitment and application process is summarized, and practices of similar programs in other states are briefly noted. South Carolina counties were categorized as urban, rural, or very rural. Analysis of TSOS across counties found that vacancies in the TSOS program were no more likely to be in rural or "isolated" areas than in urban school districts. Compared to rural-urban differences, shortages in TSOS were as likely to be linked to school climate, the availability of housing, or the match/mismatch between teacher specialists' certification and school needs. Fifty school districts located throughout the state provided TSOS to the program in 2002-03, and teachers did relocate to serve schools in other districts. No school district provided a disproportionate number of TSOS. Recommendations are offered for recruitment and placement. (SV)

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A Report on the Review of the Compensation for Teacher Specialists on Site And Their Service in Rural Areas

Authored jointly by the Staff of the Education Oversight Committee And the SC State Department of Education

November, 2002

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A Report on the
Review of the Compensation for Teacher Specialists on Site
And Their Service in Rural Areas

During the 2002 session, the General Assembly, in Provisos 1.45 and 1A.48, directed:

". . . . that the Education Oversight Committee and the State Department of Education shall examine base and supplementary compensation for teacher specialists and those fulfilling similar responsibilities in other states to determine if adjustments in the compensation should be made to encourage teacher specialists to serve in rural areas. Recommendations should be provided to the General Assembly by December 31, 2002."

The Teacher Specialist on Site (TSOS) program was established in the Education Accountability Act of 1998. The provisions of the act dealing with the program are:

> §59-18-1530(A). Teacher specialists on site must be assigned in any of the four core academic areas to a middle or high school in an impaired district or designated as below average or unsatisfactory, if the review team so recommends and recommendation is approved by the State Board of Education. Teacher specialists on site must be assigned at a rate of one teacher for each grade level with a maximum of five to elementary schools in impaired districts or designated as below average or unsatisfactory. The Department of Education, in consultation with the Division of Accountability, shall develop a program for the identification, selection, and training of teachers with a history of exemplary student academic achievement to serve as teacher specialists on site. Retired educators may be considered for specialists.
>
> (B) In order to sustain improvement and help implement the review team's recommendations, the specialists will teach and work with the school faculty on a regular basis throughout the school year for up to three years, or as recommended by the review committee and approved by the state board. Teacher specialists must teach a minimum of three hours per day on average in team teaching or teaching classes. Teacher specialists shall not be assigned administrative duties or other responsibilities outside the scope of this section. The specialists will assist the school in gaining knowledge of best practices and well-validated alternatives, demonstrate effective teaching, act as coach for improving classroom practices, give support and training to identify needed changes in classroom instructional strategies based upon analyses of assessment data, and support teachers in acquiring new skills. School districts are asked to cooperate in releasing employees for full-time or part-time employment as a teacher specialist.
>
> (C) To encourage and recruit teachers for assignment to below standard and unsatisfactory schools, those assigned to such schools will receive their salary and a supplement equal to fifty percent of the current

southeastern average teacher salary as projected by the State Budget and Control Board, Office of Research and Analysis. The salary and supplement is to be paid by the State for three years.

During the 1998-99 fiscal year, the State Department of Education (SDE), in consultation with the Division of Accountability, developed the various aspects of the program, including a rigorous selection process. The selection process includes the development of a portfolio as part of the application and at least two rounds of interviews.

Recruitment of the first TSOS began in the spring of 1999 through newspaper advertisements and letters to school district superintendents. The first TSOS were selected and placed during the 1999-2000 school year at schools in four of the seven impaired districts identified under the Education Improvement Act of 1984. A total of 31 TSOS were employed the first year. During the 2000-2001 school year, TSOS were placed in schools in the three remaining impaired districts. By the end of the 2000-2001 school year, 74 TSOS served the program in 27 schools in seven districts.

During the spring of 2001, in anticipation of an increase in the number of TSOS needed after the publication of the first school report cards, the SDE began a concerted recruitment effort. SDE predicted that over 250 TSOS would be needed for the 2001-2002 school year to completely staff the schools SDE expected to be rated as "Unsatisfactory" on the 2001 School Report Card. The recruitment effort resulted in less than enough applicants for the expected positions, and after screening the applications and conducting the interviews, the number of TSOS selected was 104 below the expected vacancies.

To address the situation, SDE developed a "tier" program that places TSOS in schools based on the unsatisfactory rating index. Schools with the lowest absolute index scores are first "tier" schools and receive TSOS first, followed by second "tier" schools whose index score is in the middle range of the unsatisfactory absolute index range. Schools with an unsatisfactory absolute index that is near the below average absolute index range receive TSOS last. In addition to the "tier" system, SDE developed the curriculum specialist program that places an individual in an unsatisfactory school to address all facets of the school curriculum, not just one grade level or academic discipline.

Despite the development of the "tier" system and the curriculum specialist program, vacancies remained in the TSOS program though the number of TSOS had grown to 146 in 2001-02. During the winter and spring of 2001-2002 SDE approached the recruitment of teacher specialists differently: they began to hold regional recruiting meetings. The regional meetings were met with some limited success as the number of applications and successful candidates continued to increase, but vacancies continued to exist. For the 2002-2003 school year, SDE predicted the need for just under 300 TSOS. By the end of April 2002 SDE recognized that the application and acceptance rates would not yield enough teacher specialists for the anticipated vacancies.

SDE expressed concern that many of the vacancies would be in the rural areas of the state. In response to the concern expressed by SDE, the General Assembly ordered this study.

Research on the issue centered on several key questions:

- What factors influence teachers to participate in the TSOS program?
- What is the recruitment and application process for the TSOS program?
- What is a rural area? Is a better term for the areas where the state is having trouble placing TSOS "isolated"?
- What states have a TSOS program similar to South Carolina?
- Which schools districts have provided the most TSOS and where are those TSOS placed?
- Where are the TSOS vacancies in 2002-03 and in what grades/disciplines?

Participation in the TSOS program

Many factors influence participation in the TSOS program. Salary is one of the most important factors drawing someone into the program. Salary is set by statute: a TSOS is paid their regular salary plus one-half of the southeastern average (for 2002-03, about $20,000). Including fringe benefits, the budgeted salary package for a TSOS is $88,000. Other issues that draw teachers to the program are the opportunity to assist in the improvement in education in South Carolina and the opportunity to increase their retirement benefits. Almost 54 percent of the 203 TSOS placed for the 2002-2003 school year have 21 or more years of experience, and 63 percent of those teachers have more than 25 years of experience. Less than nine percent of the TSOS in 2002-2003 have ten or fewer years of teaching experience.

Teachers contemplating participation in the program are influenced by many other issues. Many must take family considerations into account in deciding whether to change jobs and locations. With the majority of TSOS having families, the desire to relocate is low, and in many of the locations needing TSOS by virtue of the absolute report card rating, there are few housing options open to someone relocating for only a three year period. Many of these same communities are not in close proximity to shopping, entertainment and other amenities to which most TSOS are accustomed. And the proximity of institutions of higher learning to the receiving school is another issue for many people considering the TSOS program as many of the teachers interested in the program are presently pursuing or are considering pursuing graduate degrees.

One important consideration a potential TSOS must address is transportation and location of the receiving school. Included in this issue is the distance of the receiving school from the home of the TSOS, the time of travel between the home and receiving school and the proximity of the receiving school to interstate highways and/or other major highways. While there have been a few TSOS in the past who traveled up to 90 minutes one way each day, SDE estimates that most people would prefer to travel less than 50 minutes one way.

Another issue that teachers considering the program weigh as they decide to apply for the program is the conditions at the receiving school in regard to faculty and administrative stability. Many of the schools scoring unsatisfactory and below average on the absolute rating of the report card have a history of teacher and administrative

turnover. It is not uncommon for these schools to experience teacher turnover as great as 30 percent from one year to the next and administrative turnover every two to three years. Many TSOS candidates are reluctant to enter this situation, knowing they will have to train a large number of new teachers every year and, therefore, be unable to effect long term change at the school.

The Recruitment and Application Process

Despite the numerous issues a TSOS candidate faces in making the decision to apply for the program, SDE received several hundred applications for the TSOS program in the spring of 2002. The number of applications was a result of a change in the recruitment of applicants. Prior to the winter and spring of 2002, SDE recruited TSOS candidates by advertising in the large newspapers in the state and by sending school district superintendents and school principals a letter inviting teachers to apply. SDE hoped the superintendents and principals would post the letter, but in truth few superintendents and/or principals are interested in seeing their best teachers leave for another school. In fact, one criticism of the TSOS program by superintendents and principals has been that SDE is taking their best teachers away.

To increase applicants in 2002, SDE held regional meetings throughout the state where teachers could come and ask questions about the program. Teachers learned of the meetings through letters sent directly to them by SDE. The change in technique led to increased interest in the program and the number of applications received.

The application for the TSOS program is rigorous. According to the SDE web site:

> The applicant submits an application packet (counts 20 percent), portfolio (counts 35 percent), and video/lesson plan (counts 45 percent), which are rated by experienced educators. If the submissions receive an acceptable rating, the applicant is invited to interview. The interview questions and activities are designed to determine the applicant's knowledge of subject matter, teaching practices, leadership and communication skills, professional judgment, and ability to utilize technology. Those successful in this phase are placed in a pool of candidates and are given the opportunity to interview with eligible district superintendents. The district makes the final decision.

On the application the candidate indicates the grade level they are applying for if an elementary teacher; if the applicant is a middle school or high school teacher, they indicate the subject area in which they are applying. After the candidate is successful, the candidate is asked to indicate three schools and/or school districts needing TSOS in which they would be willing to serve. The names of the candidates are then forwarded to the appropriate district and interviews are then held by a superintendent or principal. As the description above indicates, the school district has the final say. Vacancies occur when there is an insufficient supply of candidates for a TSOS position or when the school or school district does not choose one of the available TSOS.

Definition of a Rural Area

According to the South Carolina Office of Research and Statistics, the definition of a rural area is based on the size of the largest town in that county. An urban county is one with a town larger than 25,000; a rural county is one with no town larger than 25,000; a very rural county is one whose largest town is less than 10,000. Based on this definition, the break out of the 46 South Carolina counties is:

Urban	Rural	Very Rural
Aiken	Cherokee	Abbeville
Anderson	Georgetown	Allendale
Beaufort	Greenwood	Bamberg
Berkeley	Laurens	Barnwell
Charleston	Marlboro	Calhoun
Dorchester	Newberry	Chester
Florence	Orangeburg	Chesterfield
Greenville	Union	Clarendon
Horry		Colleton
*Lexington		Darlington
*Pickens		Dillon
Richland		Edgefield
Spartanburg		Fairfield
Sumter		Hampton
York		Jasper
		Kershaw
		Lancaster
		Lee
		Marion
		McCormick
		Oconee
		Saluda
		Williamsburg

*Lexington and Pickens are considered urban since they are bedroom communities to major metropolitan areas.

While there are more very rural counties in South Carolina than urban and rural combined, the very rural counties include only 33 of the South Carolina school districts. There are 39 urban districts and 13 rural districts.

A more appropriate term than rural may be "isolated." An isolated county is defined, for the purpose of this study, as a county in which the county seat is located more than 40 miles from a town of over 10,000 and not connected by a major (multi-lane) highway or interstate highway. Isolated counties under this method would be Allendale, Barnwell, Hampton and Oconee, affecting nine school districts. It must be acknowledged that there are schools within other districts that may be isolated, but for the most part, most South Carolina school districts are located within a reasonable travel distance of large towns.

States with TSOS Programs Similar to South Carolina

Several states have developed teacher specialist programs over the last ten years. Most states with specialist programs, however, operate the programs out of state education department hubs or regional centers. The specialists do not reside at a particular school but travel between schools as needed. The specialists in these states are not required to teach three hours a day as are the TSOS in South Carolina; instead, they are expected to work with marginal teachers and do model lessons on an as needed basis.

Two states that do have similar programs to South Carolina are North Carolina and Kentucky. In both states, the teacher specialists are assigned to a school and receive a salary stipend similar to the South Carolina TSOS. In neither state, however, do teacher specialists receive additional salary or other compensation to serve in a rural/isolated school or school district. Both states make a concerted effort to recruit teacher specialists from the region in which they are needed.

School Districts Sending TSOS and Where

SDE needed 296 TSOS for the 2002-03 school year, and as of November 1, 2002, 203 had been placed. Of the 203 placed, 156 were on loan from South Carolina school districts and 47 are considered free agents with no sending district. The following chart shows from which districts TSOS came, how many they provided, and to which districts the TSOS went.

Sending District	# of teachers	Receiving Districts
Aiken	4	Aiken, Bamberg 2, Cherokee, Richland 1
Anderson 1	2	Charleston, Greenville
Bamberg 1	2	Allendale (2)
Bamberg 2	1	Bamberg 2
Barnwell 29	1	Bamberg 2
Beaufort	3	Beaufort (2), Hampton 2
Berkeley	3	Allendale, Charleston (2)
Calhoun	3	Allendale, Orangeburg 3, Orangeburg 5
Charleston	12	Charleston (10), Jasper (2)
Cherokee	2	Greenville, Marion 7
Chesterfield	1	Florence 4
Clarendon 2	5	Darlington, Florence 4, Orangeburg 3 (2), Orangeburg 5
Clarendon 3	1	Richland 1
Colleton	1	Allendale
Darlington	5	Darlington (2), Florence 4, Lee, Marlboro
Dillon 3	1	Marlboro
Dorchester 2	10	Allendale (2), Beaufort, Charleston (4), Clarendon 1, Jasper (2)
Dorchester 4	2	Charleston, Dorchester 4
Fairfield	1	Fairfield

Florence 1	4	Beaufort, Charleston, Darlington, Florence 4
Florence 2	2	Florence 4, Lee
Florence 3	2	Darlington, Lee
Greenville	10	Anderson 5, Cherokee, Clarendon 1, Greenville (6), Spartanburg 7
Greenwood 52	1	McCormick
Hampton 2	1	Allendale
Horry	11	Beaufort (2), Charleston, Dillon 2, Florence 3, Marion 1, Marion 7 (2), Marlboro, Williamsburg (2)
Jasper	1	Jasper
Kershaw	4	Charleston, Kershaw, Lee, Orangeburg 5
Lexington 1	2	Fairfield, Orangeburg 5
Lexington 2	7	Allendale (2), Barnwell 19, Lee, Orangeburg 5 (2), Richland 1
Lexington 5	5	Bamberg 2, Barnwell 19, Fairfield, Newberry (2)
Marion 1	1	Dillon 2
McCormick	1	Bamberg 2
Newberry	3	Jasper, Orangeburg 5, Richland 1
Oconee	1	Hampton 2
Orangeburg 3	1	Orangeburg 3
Orangeburg 5	3	Barnwell 19, Dorchester 4, Orangeburg 5
Richland 1	7	Lee, Orangeburg 5, Richland 1 (5)
Richland 2	8	Bamberg 2, Barnwell 19, Florence 4, Jasper (3), Orangeburg 3, Richland 1
Saluda	1	Aiken
Spartanburg 2	1	Spartanburg 7
Spartanburg 4	1	Jasper
Spartanburg 5	2	Cherokee, Union
Spartanburg 6	2	Greenville, McCormick
Spartanburg 7	2	Cherokee, Spartanburg 7
Sumter 2	2	Clarendon 1, Lee
Sumter 17	6	Allendale, Charleston, Clarendon 1 (2), Florence 4 (2)
York 1	1	Barnwell 19
York 2	1	Marion 1
York 3	2	Charleston, Richland 1
Free Agents	47	Allendale (6), Bamberg 2, Barnwell 19 (2), Charleston (5), Cherokee (2), Darlington (2), Dillon 2 (3), Fairfield, Florence 4, Florence 3, Hampton 2 (2), Jasper (3), Kershaw, Lee (6), Marion 7 (3), Newberry, Orangeburg 3, Orangeburg 5, Spartanburg 7 (2), Sumter 2, Williamsburg

A review of the hometowns of these TSOS found that just over ten percent (21) of them relocated to the receiving district. It is impossible to know how many actually relocated to the new assignment because many teachers already live outside of the district they

teach in; the TSOS from McCormick County Schools lives in Abbeville and is serving as a TSOS in Bamberg 2.

In addition to the 203 TSOS placed for the 2002-03 school year, 48 teachers remain in the candidate pool for TSOS. They have not been placed for a number of reasons, including no match between the school districts they selected and districts needing TSOS; no vacancies in the grade level or discipline they were chosen for in the districts they signed up for; and/or they were not selected by the districts they signed up for.

Below is a table containing information on the TSOS that remain in the candidate pool.

ELEMENTARY		
Grade	**# of teachers**	**Home Districts**
K	4	Florence 1, Florence 2, Horry, Richland 1
1	2	Charleston, Richland 2
2	2	Anderson 5, Marion 2
3	1	Clarendon 2
4	3	Anderson 5, Horry, Lexington 5
5	6	Aiken, Darlington, Richland 1 (2), Spartanburg 7
6	1	Charleston
1-2	3	Horry, Sumter 2, Retired
1-3	3	Charleston, Horry, Spartanburg 5
2-3	1	Dillon 2
3-5	1	Williamsburg
4-5	4	Dorchester 4, Lee, Lexington 1, Richland 2
K-5	2	Richland 2, Sumter 2
K-12	1	Richland 1

MIDDLE/HIGH		
Grade/Subject	**# of teachers**	**Home Districts**
Middle LA	5	Florence 2, Florence 3, Horry, Out-of-State, Marlboro
High LA	2	Florence 5, Orangeburg 4
Middle Math	1	CSRA HUB
High Math	1	SDE
Middle Science	6	Charleston (2), Greenville, Lancaster, Oconee, USCA HUB
High Science	0	

As the 2002-03 school year began, 93 TSOS slots remained unfilled. The table below shows the location of those vacancies.

Teacher Specialist Vacancies, 2002-03

County	Elementary	Grade	Middle	Subject	High	Subject	Total
Aiken	Ridge Spring Monetta (1)	3	A L Corbett (1)	M			2
Allendale	Fairfax (1)	6	Allendale-Fairfax (1)	S			2
Anderson 5	S. Fant (2)	K, S	South Wood (3)	E, M, S			5
Bamberg 2	Denmark-Olar (4)	K-3			Denmark-Olar (1)	S	5
Beaufort			Whale Branch (2)	M, S			2
Berkley					Timberland (1)	E	1
Charleston	Sanders Clyde (1) Ronald McNair (3) Edmund A Burns (3) Malcolm C. Hursey (1) Pepperhill (1)	3 K, 4, 5 K, 3, 5 3 5	Brentwood (1) Morningside (1) R D Schroder (3)	M E E, M, S	Burke (2) R B Stall (1) Baptist Hill (2) St. John's (3)	E, M S E, M E, M, S	22
Colleton	Hendersonville (1)	2			Colleton County (3)	E, M, S	4
Darlington					Darlington (1)	S	1
Dillon One			Lakeview (1)	E	Lakeview (1)	E	2
Florence 3					Lake City (2)	E, S	2
Greenville	Hollis Academy (4) Monaview (3)	1, 3-5 3-5	Lakeview (1)	M			8
Hampton 2	Estill (4)	K, 1, 3, 4	Estill (2)	S/M	Estill (2)	M, S	8
Jasper	West Hardeeville (1)	M	Ridgeland (1)	S	Jasper County (1)	M	3
Lee	Lower Lee (2)	1, 3					2
Marion 1	Marion (1)	5					1
Marion 7	Britton's Neck (1)	5					1
Marlboro			McColl (3)	E, M, S			3
McCormick			McCormick (2)	E, S			2
Newberry					Newberry (1) Whitmire (1)	M M	2
Orangeburg 3	Elloree (5)	1-4	Elloree (1)	M	Holly-Hill Roberts (2)	M, S	8
Orangeburg 5	Bowman (1)	5			Bowman (2)	E, M	3
Richland One			W A Perry (1)	E			1
Sumter 2			Mayewood (2)	E, S			2
Williamsburg					C E Murray (1)	M	2
Total	40		26		27		93

A close comparison of the table above with the table on the TSOS that remain in the candidate pool found that more flexibility in the way TSOS chose the grade level and/or discipline they apply for might alleviate TSOS vacancies and unplaced candidates. Two specialists in middle school science from Charleston County remain in the TSOS pool, but there are two science openings in Charleston County high schools. Additional flexibility in the school districts a TSOS can select should also allow for greater placement of TSOS.

Findings

A review of the information on the TSOS program in South Carolina and similar programs in other states reveals several findings.

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1. Vacancies in the TSOS program are no more likely to be in rural or "isolated" school districts than in urban school districts.

2. Shortages in TSOS are as likely to be linked to school climate, the availability of housing, and the match between teacher specialists certification and school needs as the shortage is linked to rural/urban school settings.

3. Fifty school districts located throughout the state provided TSOS to the program in 2002-03 and teachers did relocate to serve schools in other districts. No school district provided a disproportionate number of TSOS as compared to their workforce.

4. More flexibility is needed in the TSOS program in relation to the ability of TSOS applicants to select multiple grade levels or subject areas in the program and in selection of districts after someone has been chosen as a TSOS.

Recommendations

In relation to the findings listed above, the following recommendations are made:

1. No additional compensation to attract TSOS to rural areas of the state is needed.

2. Vigorous recruitment of TSOS candidates must be conducted in all areas of the state, especially in the larger school districts and in the rural areas of the state. Information on the TSOS program should be directed to the teachers themselves rather than through principals and superintendents.

3. When teachers apply to become TSOS, they should apply for a range of grade levels on the elementary level, such as K-3, 3-5, etc., and on the middle school level, they should be able to apply for more than one subject, depending on their certification. This change would allow more flexibility in TSOS placement and should reduce the number of candidates remaining in the pool at the beginning of the school year and the number of TSOS vacancies.

4. When teachers are selected for the TSOS program, they should be able to select more than three districts in which they will serve, allowing more flexibility in the placement of TSOS without causing selected candidates to travel undue distances.

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